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## Concerning at distance: digital activism and social media empowerment between Latin-American migrants in Spain

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on developing some important points about the use of social platforms in the life of Latin-Americans in Spain, particularly Mexican, Colombian and Venezuelan migrants. It shows the outcomes of data collected on closed groups in Facebook. The main topic centers on how social networks catalyze the spread of political engagement and public activism in between migrants concerning public matters in their homelands. Final outcomes will show that there is a clear inclination in using social platforms to discuss, organize and participate in public activism focused on resolving homeland problems. In this context, these virtual spaces serve as a link to stay in touch with their communities in Latin-America. Migrants are not only using social networks to make new relations in their new context but to ensure not to lose the connection with their friends and relatives, and of course, participate in social and political activism.

**Keywords:** Social media, digital activism, Spain, migration, Latin-America

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*Concernant la distance : activisme digital et autonomisation des médias sociaux entre les migrants latino-américains en Espagne*

**Résumé :** Cet article se concentre sur le développement de certains points concernant l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux dans la vie des latino-américains en Espagne, en particulier des Mexicains, des Colombiens et Vénézuéliens migrants. Il présente les résultats des données recueillies sur des groupes fermés dans Facebook, le principal objectif se centre sur comment les réseaux sociaux catalysent la propagation de l'engagement politique et l'activisme entre les migrants sur les affaires publiques dans leur pays d'origine. Les résultats montrent qu'il y a une nette tendance à l'utilisation des plates-formes sociales pour discuter, organiser et participer dans l'activisme pour la résolution des problèmes dans leurs lieux de naissance. Dans ce contexte, les médias sociaux servent de lien pour rester en contact avec leurs commu-

nautés en Amérique latine. Les migrants ne sont pas seulement utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour faire de nouvelles relations dans leur présent contexte, mais de ne perdre pas la connexion avec leurs parents et amis, et bien sûr, participer à l'activisme social et politique.

**Mots-clés :** réseaux sociaux, activisme digital, Espagne, migration, Amérique latine

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### **1.The Internet and its impact in Latin America**

One of the most important global changes in the last 20 years has been the mass spread and diversification of information technologies, from the design and development of the Internet to the expansion of mobile devices. The world has witnessed along these years the triumph and fall of personal computers, the consolidation of smart phones, and the wide spread of social media use as one of the main activities around the world. By now, there are more than 3.5 billion people on the planet that could access to an incommensurable amount of electronic resources and to communicate globally. Practically, information and communication technologies have touched every aspect of social life: from personal relationships, up to commerce and politics. Political activists have incorporated social media as an important strategy to spread their agenda and to encourage civic engagement to increase the importance of their movement. What has made the Internet so important to social participation is the fact that it can envelope almost all modalities of doing political communication from the simple text display to the most sophisticated forms of content that assembles multimedia and interactive elements (Oates & Gibson, 2006).

Currently there is a constant rise of Internet adoption levels in Latin America, which is one of the most active regions considering the use of social media platforms in the world, and it is expected that the number will rise in the next years to up to 271 millions of users in 2018 (Statista, 2016). This is especially remarkable considering the fact that two decades ago the total rate of users in the region only reached about the 3.7% of the entire population (Marketing Directo, 2014). This quite impressive growth is caused because the effect of three main factors: (1) the reduction of telecommunication infrastructure cost, personal computers, servers and so on (2) the diversification of internet access and finally (3) the popularization of smart phones and tablets. By now, it is easier to access alternative worldwide media that could equal the traditional one, like radio and television, through them people can spread information almost without charge and, in many cases, uncensored, in a matter of seconds (Stiver et al, 2015). Chatting and sharing information on social media platforms are in between the main activities in Latin America, like the case of Mexico, where almost half of its population, about 65 million people, has access to the Internet, and almost all of them have at least one social media account (Asociación Mexicana de Internet, 2016).

## 2. Public engagement and the Internet effect

As information technologies have disseminated all over the world, spaces like Facebook and Twitter and electronic devices like smart phones and tablets have evolved into crucial elements to promote political and social causes. Having a social media account has allowed people to increase their involvement with public matters, one particular place to observe these new forms of socialization is inside Facebook groups, collective spaces created by users who share the same goals and interests (Harlow, 2012). However, it is important to assert that when referring to digital activism we are embracing several virtual spaces, devices and applications due to the inner changing nature of these technological advances. They have evolved along the time from a unidirectional and not-so-accessible to all mode, into a more open, scalable and interactive approach that enables communication and information to be shared in different forms and across diverse devices. By now Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are some of the most typical examples of social platforms, but along the time there have been many others, like blogs and message boards that have contributed to the spread of political and social agenda since the very beginning of Internet popularization in the mid-nineties of the last century, and even many of those virtual spaces are still significant, as the case of WordPress or Blogger for example (Kleinke, 2008) (Johannessen, 2012). However, one element that is very distinctive in these new times of digital involvement is the appearance of mobile devices; they have allowed many people to turn themselves into vigorous militants that encourage private or public causes, they use mobile devices to praise for help when a natural disaster strikes on a country or a when a flagrant conflict appears in a remote area. These technical advances allow a new kind of broadcasting that could release information in a matter of seconds, and with the proper treatment, the data could even avoid official censorship (Sebastiao, 2014) (Dahlgren, 2013) (Skoric et al., 2011).

However, the growing presence of information technologies in daily life challenges traditional academic concepts, like “activism”, “community” and “social movements” also. Even the merely mention of the term “digital” is controversial, since the fact that many of the people that volunteer online do not even know each other out of cyberspace, various voices do not even consider those movements as real social or political engagement, just a galore of people that share information and give “likes”, whose actions sometimes does not have a deeper impact in society (The Economist, 2013). However, in recent years, it has been possible to observe some cases, like the “Arab Spring”, in where digital connection helped to attain profound social and political changes (González-Bailón & Wang, 2016). Though, when outlining a concept in social sciences it is possible to assert that there is not a simple and single version that could satisfy all theoretical point of views, this is especially important when dealing with traditional concepts like “activism” because there is already a long convention that must be taken on account when this term is used to describe digital engagement in online environments. So, to clarify the use, at least concerning this paper, the term “digital activism” will always indicate a cluster of

people that share the same aims and want to influence decisions concerning public matters using information technologies to spread their agenda as the main strategy.

Actually, the Internet has become one of the most important tools to politically engage, in this context, activities like sharing and monitoring information on social media have become strategic and, under certain circumstances, they could cause important outcomes, like for example, the winner candidate in a political campaign (Snow, 2013) (The Economist, 2016b). Nevertheless, sometimes digital activism only renders itself into a small complaint in cyberspace. Virtual environments are not only useful to spread political agenda or to organize protests, but in contemporary years, they have transformed themselves into an important way to raise money to support a cause and to recruit new members and sympathizers. As recent armed conflicts have shown, especially in the Middle-East, there are alternative frontlines, besides physical terrain, in where several digital battles are performed. It is in this new millennium where digital activism has a key role to play, not only to sell a discourse but to enforce deeper social and political changes (Joes, 2004). Another point regarding modern activism is the fact that by now it is extremely important, no matter the cause or the context, to jump into the international showground: thanks to the use of information technology, social movements could spread their ideas to a wider public than in the past, this is crucial to magnetize attention of global organizations in order to get resources and to gain sympathizers (Downing, 2008). The spread of political agenda out of the local context is basic for modern activism (Ranstorp, 2010), and it is inside this particular fight to catch local and international support (Bob, 2005) that the diffusion of digital content in the form of “memes”, cultural objects that are susceptible of being transmitted and replicated (Dawkins, 2006), is one of the most important strategies used by activists. What makes memes so important to social movements is their inner ability of being replicated and circulated in a matter of a second (Underwood & Welser, 2011) (Hristova, 2014) (Givan, Roberts, & Soule, 2010). In this context, an important breaking point was 2011, a year of important international and regional political protests that testified the emergence of the regional movements in the North of Africa called the “Arab Spring”(Amsidder, Daghmi, & Toumi, 2012) and the strengthening of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS), a movement that became global thanks to the use of “memes”. By now, with the use of social media platforms and mobile devices it is easier to coordinate social actions in local and international contexts (Dahlgren, 2013). Spreading information through media platforms allows to share data in a richer and interactive form than doing it with traditional media like the print press or television. This novel way permits the diffusion of information in a matter of minutes and it could be used almost by everyone, no matter if people access the Internet from a desktop computer or a mobile device they can stay in touch with other activists and to give and to receive feedback in forms that were just impossible in the past using traditional media (Johannessen, 2012). This is mainly because we are dealing with a communication that is easy to use, almost free and is very versatile, the information could be accessed by using cheap phones or a computer in a cyber-café (Skoric et al., 2011).

Besides the important advantages of using the Internet, and particularly social media, in modern societies there are still diverse opinions concerning their benefits in the case of political and social activities. In fact, you could find conflicting positions on the beneficial or negative effect of social networks. However, it is possible to assert that social networks are spaces that reflect the complexities of the off-line life, along with all its contradictions (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). While many academic works focus on how social networks are an extension of off-line social relations and how people use them to improve the way they connect with friends and families (Aslanidou & Menexes, 2008) (Rohloff, 2011) (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014) (O'Regan, Wilkinson, & Robinson, 2015). Some others studies pay attention to how social media encourages social gratification and politics (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009), like in the case of the presidential campaign in the United States in between the democratic candidate Barak Obama and the republican John McCain in 2008 (Fernandes et al; 2010). Or how to use social media to support health and social activism (Bender, Jimenez-Marroquin & Jadad, 2011). However, little attention is paid to how social media helps migrants, not only to keep their native affective relations in their homeland (Komito, 2011), but to participate in social and political activism. This text focuses on helping to fill this gap and to encourage the academic discussion about how migrants, particularly Latin American migrants in Spain, use social media to engage in public matters at distance.

### **3. Latin-American migrants in Spain and digital activism**

In the last two decades, national and international authorities have settled two contradicted kinds of policies, on one hand a more open position that looks for the entrance of global capital and investments, but in the other, the establishment of more rigid barriers to discourage the free transit of people (The Economist, 2016a). However, actual difficult economic circumstances in the continent have stressed governmental public spends. Several people in well-established economies were forced to go out looking for new opportunities. Spain, for example, experienced a massive exodus of young and well-educated people into Germany, United Kingdom and Latin America. But nevertheless, none of these problems could equal the impact of recent Syrian and African exodus phenomena that since about some years ago is disturbing the continent, there is not a single European country that is beyond the effects of this event. In fact, Europe is suffering one of the most important migration problems since the end of the World War II. This tragedy has been triggered by some complex and diverse factors, like the profound political changes in North Africa englobed under the title of "Arab Spring" that eroded traditional authoritarian governments in several countries as in the case of Egypt and Libya, but as a tangential effect it has caused economic depression and social instability, the recent emergence of the terrorist group named Daesh and the restless conflict in Syria that has forced millions of people to escape into Europe.

About Spain, this country has been traditionally an important target for Latin-American migration (Morén-Alegret, 2015) (Díaz, Gallardo & Castellani, 2012). However, in the last century, this relation has had important changes. Latin America shifted from a region that received many migrants into one that sends them (McIlwaine, 2011). While it is possible to assert that the main aim of Latin American migration is The United States of America, but as in the case of many South Americans, like Ecuatorians or Colombians, they have chosen to voyage across the Atlantic Ocean into Spain (Villaverde, Maza & Hierro, 2011), in the last decade about 1.5 million of Latin Americans traveled into the country (The Economist, 2012). This process is known in academia as the "Latin-Americanization" of Spain (Hierro, 2016). In trying to shape this process, it is possible to state that in the last two decades, Latin American migration to Spain has had two main periods, one in between 1990-1999, associated with the emergence of the flow, and in between 2000 and 2008 with the expansion and the decline of this stream (Prieto Rosas & López Gay, 2015) (Villaverde et al., 2011). But since the 2008 due to the world economic crisis many of those migrants have been forced to return to their homelands, along with many well-educated Spaniards, and to travel back into the "New World" in order to look for a job (The Economist, 2012). However, others are trying desperately to escape, as the case of Venezuelans, from the hard conditions in the "Bolivarian Republic". The problematic conditions in the country have forced them to flee into Spain and other Latin American countries, like Mexico or Colombia. According to recent statistics, Spain, despite the economic crisis and the lack of proper labor conditions, continues being an important target for migrants (Eurostats, 2016).

#### **4. Methodology and data**

This work focuses on developing some significant points concerning the use of social platforms in the life of Latin-American migrants in Spain. It shows the outcomes of data collected in Facebook closed groups, especially in those created by Mexicans, Colombians and Venezuelans. The main topic addresses how social networks catalyze political engagement and public activism in between these migrants regarding crucial public, economic and political problems in their own homeland. To classify information, the field work focused on three main topics, one for every country (See next sections). There was a close tracking during six months (From January – to July, 2016) in several Facebook groups created by migrants living in Spain, however it is possible to find inside these groups members living in Latin America that are trying to get information about how to travel to Europe. Many of the posts and comments published there were related with immigration and labor matters, but it was possible to observe how these spaces serve also as public spheres to interchange information about politics and social problems. Therefore, the migrants living in Spain could get updates about their homeland and, sometimes, to engage themselves into political activism.

#### 4.1. *Venezuelan Political and Economic Crisis*

Since the death of Hugo Chávez, former president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 1999-2013, and the arrival of Nicolás Maduro to the presidency (Both for the same Political Party, United Socialist Party of Venezuela, left-wing). Venezuela began a quick political and economic decadence and crisis. In 2015 Venezuelan PGP got a contraction of about 7,1% GDP due to diverse factors like the oil low prices, public enterprise expropriations, huge inflation, scarcity, high insecurity levels, and now, a deep political polarization. This problematic situation has forced thousands of Venezuelans to flee looking for better conditions in others countries like Colombia, The United States of America, Mexico and Spain. Actual political panorama in Venezuela is divided not only in formal political institutions, The Supreme Court reports to President Nicolás Maduro and the Congress to the opposition, but on the streets, too, with public manifestations on both sides. By now, the opposition is trying to settle a referendum to "take Maduro out of the Miraflores Palace", the bureau of presidency. But considering the actual situation it is difficult that the official party will allow it. Concerning opinions shared on social media (see Table 1) it is possible to observe how the constant loss of life quality and the limited access to quotidian goods and services (Inflation and the shortage of US dollars to facilitate importations have undermined the possibilities of middle and lower classes to access basic goods and services, like food and medicaments), other facilities, like getting a ticket to an airplane, are becoming simply inaccessible, that is why facts like the news about the end of flights of Lufthansa Airline triggers social discontent.

Regarding member's comments, it is possible to note two main facts: (1) the permanent praise to God as an intermediary that will bring justice, Venezuelans are mostly Catholic, and (2) the continuous recrimination to the actual socialist regiment as the source of all illness. This discontent with the Venezuelan left-wing regiment has had an important impact in political campaign not only in Venezuela, but surprisingly, in Spain (See section 4.4). But besides these two facts, there are other important testimonies about the difficult life of migrants in Europe "but the life of a migrant is so hard and requires a lot of fighting, more if you come to a country where you do not have any labor rights and where people take advantage of you". Venezuelan migrants in Spain, due to their precarious situation, are susceptible to get bad jobs when arriving. In this context, the nostalgia for the homeland is a recurrent topic "we have lost a lot, our lives after much fighting in our Venezuela we chose to go away searching for a better future". But there are other posts in these groups in where it is possible to spot political compromise, engagement and the disposition to fight back "I have already validated my sign (She is talking about the revocatory referendum) We must have faith that we could survive from this *crappy* government, so all the population does not have to migrate and those who had to do this, could come back". Social media, for those migrants, serves as a linkage in between those that have left and those who remain with the expectation in between leaving or surviving actual conditions as much as it could be possible, but these spaces are not only virtual rooms of collective grieves but an important scenario to



engage in political actions that could instigate election outcomes not only in Venezuela but in Spain as well.

**Table 1.** *Venezuelans in Barcelona Facebook Group.*

<b>Post</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Comentarios</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Venezolanos en Barcelona (Grupo Facebook) "Con la bandera de Venezuela el piloto alemán de Lufthansa despide el último vuelo, luego de volar por 45 años. La aerolínea Lufthansa suspendió sus vuelos hacia Venezuela, debido a la situación económica que atraviesa el país que le imposibilita cambiar la moneda local a dólares. Sus pilotos se despidieron desde la cabina del avión con una señal emblemática. ADIÓS VENEZUELA" (Mujer) Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/venezolanosenbarcelona/permalink/10153592089027344/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/venezolanosenbarcelona/permalink/10153592089027344/</a>	Venezuelans in Barcelona (Facebook Group) "With the Venezuelan flag, the German airplane pilot of Lufthansa, said goodbye, after 45 years. Lufthansa airline suspended all their flights to Venezuela, this due to the actual economic situation in the country that makes it impossible to exchange local currency into US American Dollars. Pilots said goodbye from the airplane cabin with this emblematic signal. GOODBYE VENEZUELA" (Woman).	"Que tristeza Dios mío, estamos secuestrados por un grupo de delincuentes, y nadie en el mundo hace nada por nosotros, pero sigo afeerrada a Dios Todopoderoso, él tiene el día y la hora para que esto acabe, ojalá y los que sobrevivan a este holocausto aprendan la lección que deja un comunismo, terrorismo o secta satánica, en realidad no sé cómo se llama este horror tan feroz que aquí se vive, señor ten piedad de nosotros" (Mujer).	"So sad Dear Lord! We are kidnapped by a criminal gang, and nobody in the world does something to help us, but I say "I trust Almighty God" He has the day and the hour to end this, I wish that all survivors from this holocaust could learn the lesson that left installing communism, terrorism or satanic sect, I really do not know how to call this horror so fierce that we live here, Lord have mercy on us" (Woman)
Venezolanos en Madrid (Grupo Facebook) "Que triste mis paisanos no estar en el país donde nacimos lo más triste es que por culpa de unos hijos de putas	Venezuelans in Madrid (Facebook Group) "So sad my countrymen not being in the country we were born, but	"¡Ya yo validé mi firma! (Referendo revocatorio) Tengamos fe que saldremos de porquería. Para que no tengamos que	"I have already validated my sign (She is talking about the revocatory referendum) We must have

<p>revolucionarios estamos pasando mucho trabajo, muchos perdimos nuestras vidas después de tanto luchar en nuestra Venezuela decidimos salir de ella por un mejor futuro, pero la vida del inmigrante es muy dura tienes que luchar mucho y más si vienes sin tener ningún derecho en este país teniendo trabajos donde se aprovechan de ti". (Hombre) Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/4909133398/permalink/10154253793358399/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/4909133398/permalink/10154253793358399/</a></p>	<p>sadder is that thanks to these <i>fucking</i> revolutionaries (translated without censorship from the original text) we are having a lot of troubles, we have lost a lot, our lives after much fighting in our Venezuela we chose to go away searching for a better future, but the life of a migrant is so hard and requires a lot of fighting, more if you come to a country where you do not have any labor rights and where people take advantage of you". (Man)</p>	<p>emigrar más y todos los que se fueron puedan regresar. ¡Así que seguimos luchando para que el país se recupere pronto! (Mujer)"</p>	<p>faith that we could survive from this crappy government. Therefore, all the population does not have to migrate and those who had to do this, could come back. So, let's keep fighting for the relief of the country" (Women)</p>
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#### 4.2. Peace in Colombia

In February 2012, a series of meetings in between Colombian authorities and the members of the FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in Spanish: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, a guerrilla army with the purpose of establishing a way of ending a long-lasting conflict) started. Along these years there have been agreements and differences, discussions and meetings in countries like Cuba or Norway. It was in Havana, Cuba where in the 23rd of June of 2016 both sides sealed a treaty asserting the end of hostility, however although this conflict, with more than 50 years of length is about to end, the future about how this agreement is going to work is uncertain, there are still many people that believe that the Colombian government made too many concessions to the guerrilla and there are not guarantees of a peaceful reintegration of ex-guerrilla soldiers into society. However, this agreement had to be validated by citizens on October 2nd of 2016, at the end, Colombians chose "No" by a narrow margin. This surprising and polarized outcome

could be enlightened in part by reviewing the Colombian migrant's opinion on social media. Doubts and lack of optimism pervade comments in there, and in where the use of "memes" and jokes regarding the peace process is frequent (See Table 2) "Pobres de aquellos que creen en esta *Farczapaz*" (poor of those who believe in this *Farczapaz* (A pun in between FARC, the guerrilla name, adding the letter "s" to form the Spanish word "farsa", which means fake, and peace, "fake peace"), or attacking politics like the case of the former president Álvaro Uribe, linked with diverse corruption scandals. This "not so enthusiastic" aptitude is not surprising since there are many Colombians in Spain that have been forced to go out of the country because the economic situation or the guerrilla conflict that has displaced thousands of people from their homes in some regions of the country. But besides, distance and the fact of living in another context, thanks to social media, they are not isolated, on the contrary, they are constantly sharing information, comments and graphic contents, and are still being concerned about what is happening on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

**Table 2.** *Colombians in Barcelona Facebook Group*

Post	Translation
Colombianos en Barcelona. (Grupo de Facebook) (Un meme gráfico que muestra unas manchas de sangre rodeando las letras) "No más Uribe. (Álvaro Uribe, ex-presidente de Colombia y actual Senador) Porque el Centro Democrático es un partido lleno de corruptos que se encuentran huyendo de la justicia". (Mujer) Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/colombianosbarcelona/permalink/612246315611100/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/colombianosbarcelona/permalink/612246315611100/</a>	Colombians in Barcelona (Facebook Group) A graphic meme that depicts some blood spots surrounding the next statement "No more Uribe (Álvaro Uribe, former President of Colombia, actually a Senator) Because the Democratic Center is a Political Party full of corrupts that are running away from justice" (Woman)
Colombianos en Barcelona (Grupo Facebook). "Pobres de aquellos que creen en esta <i>Farczapaz</i> . Se les escapó la memoria.... o no han vivido la triste, cruel y realidad de Colombia". (Hombre) Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/colombianosbarcelona/permalink/614453458723719/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/colombianosbarcelona/permalink/614453458723719/</a>	Colombians in Barcelona (Facebook Group) "Poor of those that believe in this fake peace. They lost memory, or they have not lived the sad and cruel reality of Colombia". (Man)

4.3. *Education reform and protests in Mexico*

In 2012, the president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, proposed an education reform, which was approved on January 2013. One of the most important changes was the establishment of a new evaluation system. Teacher unions claimed for the lack of legitimacy of that modification since they have never been consulted about it. So, since the enactment of the reform, there have been several “offline” and “online” complaints toward the execution of this new evaluation procedure. Most of the digital actions have been related with the use of social profiles for disseminating multimedia content, like memes showing the dislike with this reform. One of the hardest teacher unions is the CNTE (La Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, National Coordination of Education Workers) that has had a long history of conflicts against local and federal authorities. On June 19 of 2016, there was a bloody confrontation in between CNTE activists and the local and federal police, the outcome was 8 casualties. Since this event there have been subsequent manifestations in pro of the teachers, but a great sector of the population is not happy with these mobilizations, especially with highway blockades affecting communications. As it is possible to observe in table 3, Facebook helps migrants to organize protests versus Mexican government and in pro teacher’s cause.

**Table 3.** *Mexicans in Barcelona Facebook Group.*

Post	Translation	Comentarios	Translation
Mexicanos en Barcelona (Grupo Facebook. “A les 19:30h a la Plaça Sant Jaume solidaritat i visibilització d’#OaxacaResiste no siguem indiferents a la barbàrie. (Mujer). Compartido por Capgirem BCN. I la CUP”. (Escrito en catalán, idioma oficial de la ciudad de Barcelona junto el español o Castellano). (Este texto aparece junto a un meme gráfico donde se describe al actual Presidente Peña Nieto con su	Mexicans in Barcelona (Facebook Group) “At 19:30 in the Plaça Sant Jaume, solidarity and visualization of the movement "OaxacaResiste" do not be indifferent to the cruelty”. (Woman). (Writing in Catalan, official language along with Spanish in Barcelona) This text appears with a graphic meme that depicts actual Mexican President Peña Nieto raising his hand painted with red blood and with the number 43 in it	“¡Organicemos algo que suene fuerte, Plaza Cataluña!”. (Mujer)	“Let’s do something strong, in Cataluña Plaça!” (Woman)

mano pintada de Sangre y con el número 43 escrito en ella, en una clara alusión a los estudiantes muertos en Ayotzinapa en 2014). Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/57332439401/permalink/10154263130564402/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/57332439401/permalink/10154263130564402/</a>	(A clear reference to 43 students murdered in Ayotzinapa in 2014)		
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A deeper analysis of posts is very helpful to clarify how social platforms serve to link online and off-line protests concerning local and foreign public matters. In this case, the simple use of the Catalan language is not a mere ornament, but a symbolic action, because Catalan people are very sensitive concerning their culture, especially the language. Consequently, the use of the Catalan language, not Spanish, or Castellano as people from Barcelona called it, in the post serves as a form to get sympathies with the movement not only in between Mexicans, but with Catalan people too. What social media does so well is that it spreads a message to a wide and unlike public, in this case the activists are trying to expand the messages not only in between migrants but with Catalans too, trying to get synergies in between persons, migrants and locals, that considering actual labor and economic conditions in Barcelona, could have had serious disagreements when pondering other themes like social subsidies or immigration policies issues. But activists want not only to share a message but to gain sympathies and support to continue rising the intensity of the actions. As we could observe in the commentary (table 3), Facebook members got the information about a public manifestation and they are trying to organize a bigger one in one of the most important public places in Barcelona (Plaça España). Sometimes these actions derivate only in good intentions but occasionally they massively spread into something else, like the “Arab Spring” or protests versus racial discrimination in The United States of America.

#### 4.4. *On local and foreign political engagement.*

2016 will endure as a very important year regarding the future of Spain, there have been two general elections, however none of them have had a definitive winner. Besides the fact that The People's Party (right-wing) has won both, it was not enough to allow its candidate Mariano Rajoy to be elected as president for a second period. The People's Party got more votes in the two elections, although its current government is not very popular due to public expense cuts, corruption scandals and

employment low rates. Left-wing political parties (PSOE and Podemos) were still required for Mariano Rajoy’s aspirations, but both parties were unwilling to support him, until October 2016 when PSOE, due to political and social pressure, abstained to vote against Mariano Rajoy candidature, this fact allowed him to get a second period as president. However, political panorama endures polarized in between those who want a change and those who trust in the current government and its statistics about economic improvement and recovery. In this context, what is interesting when reading posts and comments of Latin American migrants in Spain is how their involvement at a distance affects not only their homeland but the receptor country too. According to testimonies on Facebook, those who have left a country with a ruling president from a central or right-wing political party, with a strong emphasis in free market and liberalism, like the case of Mexico where the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional, The National Action Party, right-wing) ruled the country for 12 years from 2000-2012, and the actual president Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) belongs to PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Institutional Revolutionary Party, center or moderate), or Colombia with Alvaro Uribe -right- that was president from 2002 to 2010. Those migrants are more willing to support left-wing political parties (See table 4).

**Table 4.** *Migrants testimonies supporting left-wing political parties*

Post	Translation	Comentarios	Translation
(Miembro del grupo Mexicanos en Barcelona, post en su propio muro "Decepcionada y sin embargo no sorprendida por el resultado de las elecciones..." (Mujer). El Partido Popular (Derecha) tuvo mejores resultados que Podemos o PSOE (Izquierda).	Member of the Facebook Mexicans in Barcelona, a post in her own Facebook wall "Disappointed, notwithstanding not surprised by the electoral outcome." (Woman) (In June 26th general elections in Spain, El Partido Popular, People's Party, (right-wing) got better outcomes than left-wing political parties: Podemos (We can) or The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	"A mí me resulta tan inverosímil que creo que los votos están manipulados..." (Mujer)	"It looks so incredible that I think the votes are fixed" (Woman)

This could be explained by two main reasons: a) because traditionally, left-wing political parties in Spain are more receptive regarding migrants than right-wing parties (In 2005 the left-wing president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero helped to regulate more than 500,000 migrants in irregular migration status), b) many of those migrants in Spain left their countries looking for better labor conditions and, in many cases, escaping from political persecution and high criminality levels in their communities when they departed, right or centre political parties ruled in their homelands, Mexico and Colombia. But, this is not necessarily a constant, on the contrary, as it is possible to remark in the case of migrants that came from countries ruled by left-wing parties, like Cuban-Americans living in The United States of America that are inclined to vote for the Republican Party (right-wing) and Venezuelans living in Spain that are more willing to support right-wing parties (See Table 5).

**Table 5.** *Migrants testimonies supporting right-wing political parties.*

<b>Post</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Comentarios</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Venezolanos en Madrid (Grupo Facebook) -Un meme gráfico-"Salí de Venezuela huyendo de este corazón (Figura de un corazón con el lema "Hugo Chávez Corazón de mi patria") / Y ahora en España me toca este corazón (Logo del Partido Político Español de Izquierda Podemos) (Hombre) Dirección <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/4909133398/permalink/10154269249483399/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/4909133398/permalink/10154269249483399/</a>	Venezuelans in Madrid (Facebook Group) a graphic meme with the following phrase "I left Venezuela escaping from this heart (next is a figure of a heart with the saying "Hugo Chávez heart of my homeland" and now in Spain I found this other heart (The logo of the left-wing political party Podemos (We can) (Man)	"Que dios y la virgen iluminen a los hermanos españoles en el momento de ejercer su derecho al voto y no apoyar a un grupo de radicales que contribuyeron al desastre en nuestra País con su asesoramiento al finado." (Mujer).	"May God and the Holy Mary enlighten our Spaniard brothers when voting, they do not support this group of radicals that helped cause the disaster of our country with their advice to the dead one". (Woman). (Hugo Chávez, former president who passed away in 2013).

So, it was not only the fact that many Venezuelans with double nationality voted indeed for the People's Party, and supported them on social media, but the case of Venezuela served to the People's Party as an important discourse "weapon" to attack the left-wing Political Party Podemos. There is a shared thought in between Venezuelan migrants that this political party played, true or not, an important role to cause the actual problematic situation in their homeland "May God and the Holy Mary enlighten our Spaniard brothers when voting, they do not support this group of radicals that helped cause the disaster of our country with their advice to the dead one" (Hugo Chávez, former president who passed away in 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Actually, the Internet is a very important channel to create social engagement, even in between migrants, because it allows the communication and interchange of thousands of people in a matter of seconds, avoiding distance and time (Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2010). Information flows quickly and, with the proper procedure, uncensored from one point to another. Social media has emerged as a public forum for hosting a huge and diverse amount of information: from ludic and banal to the more preponderant and even vital data. People can create and share information and build communities with several grades of engagement. Social media has had a huge impact not only as a novel communication channel that supports migration networks, but as an important factor that actively transforms the nature of these networks, encouraging not only human mobility but the transfer of information and knowledge, that are of extreme value not only for those who want to migrate, diminishing risks, but for non-profit organizations and public dependencies that play an active role in this process (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). In many cases, social media serves also as a channel to promote activism, not only as a local level, but in many cases, it helps migrants to play an active role when dealing with public affairs in their homeland and the country in which they reside.

The constant grow of the Internet adoption levels, especially the use of social media platforms, in between Latin Americans, migrants or not, has carried many possibilities to engage into political and social activism (Welp & Wheatley, 2012). Social media has given migrants a new tool for sharing impressions, data, news and commentaries in the form of text, pictures, audio and video (Kissau & Hunger, 2009) (Komito, 2011). Posting on social platforms provides the possibility to carry with them, at least virtually, those ideas, feelings and aspirations that were left in their communities, and the constructions of imaginaries around cultural assets like food (Farge & Moretti, 2015) (Vázquez-Medina & Medina, 2015). In this context, some close groups created by migrants in Facebook are not only digital spaces with members but an opportunity to recreate the world that was left behind (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014) (Ramírez, 2016). In recent years, social media activism in between Latin Americans has mediatized governmental and public affair problems like huge corruption cases in Mexico and Brazil (The Economist, 2016c). These cases



have shown how citizens, even migrants at distance, are willing to share and participate in public problems. And in regarding traditional troubles, like corruption, visibility is a great and an important step to diminish them. When people in the region are forced to go out into another country they travel not only with “ their cultural luggage” but with their concerns about the state in which they have left their homeland, this is why they continue at distance trying to have an influence in their country’s public matters, in this context, social media platforms are optimal spaces to politically engage like sharing testimonies, images, multimedia elements, and "memes", and in some cases to establish solidarity chains, that could impact the outcome of elections, but even, as in the case of Venezuelans, their activism could impact local elections in Spain. Social media testimonies have revealed, that besides their inner problems and difficulties, migrants are using social platforms to discuss, organize and participate in public activism focused on resolving birthplace problems. Social media serves them as a link to stay in touch with their communities in Latin-America. Migrants are not only using social networks to make new relations in their new context but to ensure not to lose the connection with their friends and relatives, and of course, participate in social and political activism.

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